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1962/11/09

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Paul H. Nitze
9 November 1962
Booth

MEMORANDUM FOR THE NSC EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: Revised Course of Action in the Contingency that a Surveillance Plane is Shot at or Destroyed

1. The importance and legitimacy of surveillance should be a constant theme in our public and private discussions of the Cuban problem, to build understanding at all levels of the contribution which such surveillance is making to the reduction of danger.
2. In the event one of our surveillance planes is shot at or destroyed, we should first establish the facts beyond any reasonable doubt.
3. In the case of an unsuccessful attack by anti-aircraft artillery or by fighters, the President should [send an urgent message to Khrushchev stating that we will be obliged to retaliate immediately in the event of any further attack on our planes and ask that he urge the Cubans immediately to cease such attacks.]
4. In case one of our aircraft is shot down by fighters in an isolated incident the appropriate action would be [against MIGs whether in the air or on airfields. In case one of our aircraft is shot down by anti-aircraft artillery, there should be a prompt retaliation against those positions. In either of the above cases, it would be presumed that the action was by Cubans, not by Russians.]
5. If there were an attack, successful or unsuccessful, against one of our surveillance aircraft by a SAM as an isolated incident, we should [eliminate the particular SAM site or sites responsible for the action.]
6. In the contingencies covered in paragraphs 4 or 5, we should [arrange for a message from the President to Khrushchev to be delivered, as nearly as possible, simultaneously with the attack. The message to Khrushchev would explain the vital necessity of continuing aerial surveillance pending establishment of other arrangements, would refer to Kuznetsov's statement to McCloy on October 31 (USUN 1581 to State) that all anti-aircraft in Cuba is in Cuban hands, and state that the action taken was necessary to enable us to continue surveillance.]
7. In all three contingencies covered in paragraphs 3, 4 or 5, the OAS would be informed of our intended action as far as possible in advance, without request for an endorsement. It would be advisable to inform the NATO Council and the Secretary General of the UN of our action and the reason for it. In all cases we should announce to the public what had happened, the action we have taken, and the nature of the position we were communicating to the USSR.

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8. The foregoing discussion refers to an isolated incident which does not indicate a general intention on the part of Soviet or Cuban authorities to resist U.S. air surveillance. If the latter situation arises, it will be necessary to proceed to wider action. Such wider action would include one or all of the following actions: (1) an extensive elimination of Cuban air defenses; (2) attacks against the IL-28's; (3) a reimposition and expansion of the quarantine to complete blockade.

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